Adapting teachers and students to the pandemic environment

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Abstract: The aim of the study is to examine theoretically what a pandemic is, what adaptation to the environment is, what are the factors influencing it and what are the methods to study it. Define the concept of adaptation and investigate the empirical environment of the work environment using A. Velichkov and M. Radoslavova, deriving the main reference points that can be used for similar studies in the future. The objects of the present study in 2021 are 110 individuals aged between 15 and 65 years. By examining the factors influencing people and interpersonal relationships at work, it is easy to track their adaptation to the environment in the short or long term.

Keywords: adaptation, pandemic, change, phenomenon, individual, virus, teachers, students.

Introduction

The consequences of the current pandemic are long-lasting. They extend to all aspects of our lives and daily routines. On the one hand are the health problems and on the other are the economic problems. The coronavirus is leaving a lasting mark on health. Studies have shown that even those who have overcome the infection and officially consider themselves healthy are not always well. They may suffer muscle aches, fatigue and mental disturbances such as fears and depression. These are some of the most common long-term consequences of infection (The Guardian, 2020). Data from this study suggests that even six months after the end of the acute (or active) phase of the disease over 60% of cured patients who have been in hospital continue to suffer from subsequent symptoms. Three hypotheses can be derived, which after conducting the research and summarizing the results can be confirmed or rejected:

• It is assumed that there will be significant differences between teacher and student results, with a greater proportion of teacher responses indicating that they are more adapted to working in the current emergency.
• There will be no significant differences between the responses of the two groups (teachers and students), indicating that both groups have adapted to the emergency epidemiological situation at the same level, and it does not matter whether it is low (they have not adapted, or have adapted with difficulty to the present) or have adapted very well to the present moment.
• It is assumed that there will be significant differences between teacher and student outcomes, with a greater proportion of student survey responses indicating that they adjust better than teachers to emergency work.

The spread of the Coronavirus from early 2020 has caused a serious economic shock both in Bulgaria and worldwide. In order to limit the spread of the virus, Bulgaria introduced a state of emergency in the spring that lasted from 13 March to 13 May. This also had a major psychological impact on people, because no one had experienced such restrictions in their lifetime. People were frightened.

Children's development in the period of middle childhood (between 6 and 12 years of age) and adolescence (12-18 years of age) is fundamental for them in terms of socialization, their growth (in terms of it being a period of change, a relationship between child and adult) and first relationships and attractions from the other sex. According to Piaget, children aged from about 7 to about 11 enter the stage of concrete operations. This is a turning point in cognitive development. Thinking is much more logical, flexible and organized compared to earlier (Burke, 1994).
Adolescence is a period of childhood development that covers the ages between 11 and 18. It is divided into 3 parts - early adolescence (11-14 years), middle adolescence (14-16 years) and late adolescence (16-18 years). Early adolescence is mostly characterised by the entry into puberty. In boys, this is most often characterised by rapid growth, the presence of ejaculation and awareness of their sexual orientation. In girls, the first menstruation occurs. Of course, the sexes begin to feel attracted to each other and start going out/dating. Emotionally, adolescents during this period become more sensitive.

The emergency created by the pandemic has created numerous problems of all kinds. This forces teachers to face new challenges unknown to them. The average age of teachers in Bulgaria is just under 50 years old, up from 53 only 3-4 years ago.

The questionnaire "Adaptation of the individual to the environment" was created and adapted by A. Velichkov and M. Radoslavova, who is a well-known author of psychological literature. The questionnaire is divided into two parts, or two blocks (A and B). The first part (personality adaptation) is defined as the establishment of such relationships between the individual and the environment that enable him to regulate his behavior in the direction of his own endeavors and the general goals of the environment. For the adapted individual, interaction with the environment is subjectively acceptable, as he can manifest and develop his personal potential while conserving his resources. The adaptation of the individual to the environment implies the presence of a full-fledged personal regulation over his behaviour. Empirical evidence on particular aspects of it is abundant.

Theoretically, they are unified in the notion of the dimensions of positive mental functioning. They are as follows:

2. Personal growth- subjective assessment of available opportunities for self-development and self-improvement, e.g. for acquiring and changing competencies, attitudes, beliefs, etc. in life.
3. Life goals-ability to set and pursue long-term personal goals and life plans in the environment.
4. Autonomy- experiences of independence in forming and defending one's own views, thinking and behaviour from other people with whom one is together in the same environment.
5. Personal control over the environment - the ability of the individual to establish control over the course of events and processes in life and to cope successfully with emerging problems.
6. Positive relationships - the ability to express empathy and to establish close relationships with other people in the environment and to have feelings of affection.

The authors believe that these aspects of positive psychological functioning are a product of the individual's overall interaction with the environment at a certain point in his life. In our view, however, he does not always and everywhere manage to plan and act in such a way as to manifest and develop himself as a person. Therefore, it is more adequate to speak of partial adaptation in different social environments or under changed demands and opportunities of a given environment. When its conditions do not agree with personality characteristics and the individual cannot leave the environment, he adjusts his behaviour so as to conform to expectations and achieve his plans to an acceptable extent. The test is anonymous, with respondents filling in their gender and age. The first part of the test contains 50 items which are in the form of statements. Some of them are:

- "I have no self-confidence here"
- "I have a lot to learn here"
- "I am stuck here and cannot develop"
- "One needs to have many qualities to be here"
- "The future seems unclear to me"

In Block A, the respondent is allowed to choose from 5 response options, and must choose only one for each question. They are:

- Not true at all
- To a small extent true
- Somewhat true
- Largely true
- Quite true

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The second part of the test is a method for assessing work alienation. In psychology, it has long been known that certain aspects of work (such as anticipated dangerous consequences of task failure, tight deadlines, the presence of major difficulties, the inability to maintain a positive self-image) condition the frequent or chronic experience of stress. Intensive research on stress at work has found that professions related to serving people (doctors, teachers, social workers, police officers) significantly subject professionals to stresses of this nature. This in turn results in a state of so-called "burnout" (psychological burnout) (Cenova, 1993). It is characterised by passivity, pessimistic attitudes, experiences of depression and feelings of helplessness, and reduced performance. Very often, the state of burnout occurs in individuals who were highly motivated in their work at the beginning, but experienced great disappointments due to not confirming their perceptions of the effects of their work. Alienation from work is one aspect of burnout, although in some cases it is the result of other factors - overwork, social isolation, conflicts with management. It is a specific condition that should not be confused with job dissatisfaction. Job dissatisfaction, in turn, depends on the level of aspirations that people have in their work and manifests itself in several forms: constructive dissatisfaction, which can be eliminated by making a special effort to change working conditions, resignative dissatisfaction, where a person acquiesces and lowers his or her level of aspirations, and pseudo-satisfaction, which is compensated by a softened or distorted perception of working conditions. All of these forms of job dissatisfaction reduce the quality of performance if they are not offset by managerial efforts to incentivize employees, but most of all they affect subjective well-being and self-esteem at work. Job alienation is the last step before the disconnect between the individual and his or her work behaviour in a workplace. It occurs when a person ceases to find meaning in his or her efforts and begins to view the work he or she is doing with disgust. Increased work alienation is a symptom of loss of motivation to work and deterioration in work behaviour. The organisation suffers because it cannot get what it expects from the employee, but the employee also suffers because he experiences mainly negative emotions at work. His behaviour can also have a negative impact on other employees. The diagnosis of job alienation is relevant in several respects. Firstly, registering early manifestations of alienation from work makes it possible to identify timely measures to compensate for it. Furthermore, such manifestations (especially if they occur in large numbers of employees) signal a shortcoming in management style and the need to change it. Second, abuse of office is more likely to occur in individuals with elevated levels of job alienation, which is why diagnosing this condition allows predictions to be made about the likelihood of such incidents occurring in employees. Thirdly, combating occupational stress involves diagnosing it, and job alienation is one of its manifestations. Finally, a detailed study of job alienation and the factors that condition it allows psychologists to provide sound recommendations for optimizing the management and functioning of the organization. The proposed method makes it possible to obtain information to help solve practical problems of the above nature and also to use it in conducting scientific research.

It can also find wider application in occupational and organizational psychology, since the signs of its content are universally applicable to any profession.

The second part of the questionnaire (Block B) consists of 10 items in the form of statements. Some of them are:

- "I experience indifference to the tasks that are set to me"
- "I don't pay attention to some instructions and instructions"
- "I attend purely formally, it was to feel personally involved"
- "I don't delve too deeply into what exactly is required of me"

In Block B, respondents are allowed to choose from 6 response options, and must select one of them. They are:

- Never
- It has happened once or twice
- It happens, but rarely
- Happens from time to time
- Happens often
- Happens very often
- This is almost constantly
Thanks to this environmental adaptation test we will be able to track and compare the level of adaptation of both teachers and students in an online (or blended) learning environment. In the future, in order to enrich the data, it is possible to administer the adaptation test again when all students and teachers are fully present again in order to track the differences between the different learning modes.

The object of this study is to analyze and place precise characteristics of adaptation to the environment in teachers and students by the year 2021. The subjects of the study are 110 individuals aged between 15 and 64 years, teachers and students working and studying in a Bulgarian school environment. The origin of the persons studied is mainly Bulgarian. They are all part of the same unit and it is therefore interesting to trace the social environment of the students. The group of teachers is composed of 53 persons and the group of students is 57.

Of all 53 teachers who took part in the survey, only 9 were male, or 17% as a percentage. There were 44 female teachers, which equates to 83%. Out of the entire group of students (which is 57 people), 23 teenagers are boys, which is 40.4%. Girls are slightly more, 34, which in percentage terms equals 59.6%

All students who participated in the study were around 15 years old (+ - 1). For teachers there are 4 groups:

- Group from 24 to 34 years - they are only 3 people, which is 5.7%.
- Group 35 to 44 years - they are the second largest group and account for 17 people, which corresponds to 32.1%.
- Group 45 to 54 years - this is the largest group - 19 persons, which is 35.8%.
- 55 to 64 years group - this group is made up of 14 people, or 26.4%.

Results of the study

The obtained results were processed with SPSS - 21 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program using:

- Descriptive statistics
- Correlation analysis
- Comparative analysis

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of aspects of individual's adaptation to the environment (teachers):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adapted from</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of self</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2.788</td>
<td>0.245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2.709</td>
<td>0.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life goals</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.318</td>
<td>0.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.127</td>
<td>0.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control over the environment</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.195</td>
<td>0.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.291</td>
<td>0.413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the descriptive statistics reported in the table show the proportion of the variance of different aspects of adaptation to the environment. According to the data, it is observed that the subjects put "Life goals" (x=3.318; sd=0.429) and "Positive relationships" (x=3.291; sd=0.413) in the top positions. This tells us about putting personal goods first. The individuals surveyed put their long-term goals, their pursuit of them, and workplace positivity at the forefront. In the last two places are "Self Acceptance" (x=2.788; sd=0.245) and "Personal Growth" (x=2.709; sd=0.326). Self-acceptance is associated with awareness of personal good qualities and shortcomings, their acceptance, and a sense of dignity and self-worth. Personal growth is associated with an individual's subjective evaluation of development and self-improvement, as well as the acquisition of new competencies. These results show us that the teachers studied do not pay enough attention to their development,
whether it is working on good or bad qualities or acquiring new competencies, which is of particular importance in this profession. In the middle of the table in terms of indicators stand the dimensions "Autonomy" ($x=3.127; sd=0.363$) and "Control over the environment" ($x=3.195; sd=0.302$). Autonomy is associated with forming and asserting one's own views in the environment, and control over the environment is associated with how well one is able to establish control over the environment - people, events and processes and dealing with problems. These two dimensions are closer to the first two than to the next two. The results suggest that autonomy and control are relatively important for teachers in the environments in which they work.

The conclusion we can draw from the descriptive statistics is that the teachers' scores are relatively similar, with very little variation across the different dimensions. It can be said that teachers need to be stimulated to work towards better recognizing, working and dealing with their good and bad traits and qualities and working towards developing professional skills.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of aspects of individual's alienation from work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Konstruct</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6.7358</td>
<td>6.33109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the descriptive statistics, reported in a table, show the scores of the individuals surveyed on the Alienation dimension. This is the second part of the survey that was used on teachers only. There was a relatively higher alienation ($x=6.7358; sd=6.33109$). The "Alienation" dimension was most often associated with anticipated dangerous consequences of task failure, short deadlines, presence of major difficulties, and inability to maintain a positive self-image. Not to be confused with burnout. It is inherent in social professions - police officers, teachers, social workers, etc. High levels of this dimension are characterized by reduced quality of work, low self-esteem at work, reluctance to work, loss of motivation, etc. The individual suffers from this result, the students on the other hand, and the organization suffers as well.

Table 5. Correlations between the aspects of Alienation and the other scales of the questionnaire of adaptation of the individual to the environment (teachers):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alienation</th>
<th>Acceptance of self</th>
<th>Personal growth</th>
<th>Life goals</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Control over the environment</th>
<th>Positive relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.256</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>-.331 *</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>-.321 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.537</td>
<td>.908</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A correlation is statistically significant when the significance level is less than 0.05.

Alienation is a stressful condition that is associated with withdrawal from both the work and the organisation itself. The dangerous consequences of task failure, tight deadlines, the presence of major difficulties, and the inability to maintain a positive self-image condition the frequent or chronic experience of stress. This in turn brings a person to a state of burnout, or psychological burnout. It is characterized by passivity, pessimistic attitudes, experiences of depression and feelings of helplessness, and decreased performance. Very often, the state of burnout occurs in persons who were highly motivated in their work at the beginning, but have experienced great disappointments due to not confirming their ideas about the effects of their work. Alienation from work is one aspect of burnout, although in some cases it is the result of other factors - overwork, social isolation, conflicts with management. It is a specific condition that should not be confused with job dissatisfaction. Job alienation is the last step before the disconnection between the individual and his or her work behaviour in a workplace. It
occurs when a person ceases to find meaning in his or her efforts and begins to view with disgust and intolerance the work he or she is doing. Increased work alienation is a symptom of loss of work motivation and deterioration in work behaviour. The organisation suffers because it cannot get what it expects from the employee, but the employee also suffers because he experiences mainly negative emotions at work. His behaviour can also have a negative impact on other employees.

For four of the scales in Block A, there were no statistically significant relationships between them and alienation ("Self-acceptance," "Personal growth," "Autonomy," "Control over environment."). For two others, a significant and negative correlation was observed with alienation. A negative correlation is a relationship between two variables that move in opposite directions. The negative correlation coefficient is also called the inverse correlation. In other words, when variable A increases, variable B decreases. Negative correlation is also known as inverse correlation. For the Life Goals scale (r=−0.331 ; p=0.015), there is a moderate negative correlation between alienation and life goals. The results clearly show us that stress and anxiety at work directly affect the long-term personal goals and plans we set for ourselves in the work environment. Stress is something that one experiences in the here and now, it can be very prolonged but it cannot be deferred in time (tomorrow I will be stressed, now I will rest). While on the other hand, life goals are something that take a lot of time and perseverance to accomplish and the results are positive. The Positive Relationships dimension (r=−0.321 ; p=0.019) also showed a moderate correlation with alienation. The results indicate that stress negatively affects the experience of empathy, establishing close contacts and relationships with colleagues at work and experiencing attachment. Stress, the experience of negative attitudes and feelings directly interfere with the maintenance of positive relationships in the organization. Overwork, poor relationships, and other causes of low self-control lead to this detrimental relationship with both co-workers and bosses/subordinates and the organization itself. Positive relationships and alienation are opposite mutually exclusive constructs.

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